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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)  
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS  
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Date      Declassify on      Reason     

9/76  
F m Heilsen DI  
ARPA ORDER NO.: 189-1  
6D20 Cybernetics Technology

Rm 7802

CM ØØ1

R-1857-DOS/ARPA

September 1976

## Dealing with Political Kidnapping (U)

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A report prepared for  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
and  
DEFENSE ADVANCED RESEARCH PROJECTS AGENCY

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No country in recent years has experienced a kidnapping problem equivalent to that of Argentina, where there have been hundreds of kidnappings. The kidnappings in Argentina generally fall into one of four categories. First, there are the purely political kidnappings carried out by Peronist and leftist urban guerrillas and aimed primarily at those involved in the 1955 overthrow of President Juan Perón, and

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at police or military officials involved in current campaigns against the guerrillas. Ransom is seldom at issue here. The hostages are taken for the purposes of interrogation, trial before a "people's court," and sometimes "execution." The most spectacular kidnappings in this category were the kidnapping and murder of former Argentine President Pedro Aramburu in 1970, and the kidnapping of Admiral Alemán, who is supposed to have admitted that the military regime before Perón's return was dictatorial and used torture against its political opponents.

Second, there are the kidnappings of representatives--foreign nationals or local officials--of foreign companies, who are held for cash ransom, which is used to finance the guerrilla movements themselves or to finance philanthropic enterprises designated by the guerrillas. One of the most spectacular of these was the 1973 kidnapping of an American official of the Exxon Corporation and his release three months later after the company paid a record \$14.2 million cash ransom. In 1975, another of the urban guerrilla groups collected a reported \$16 million for the release of the Born brothers of the international trading conglomerate Bunge and Born. The major urban guerrilla organizations that carry out these kidnappings are usually well-organized, have numerous hideouts and good logistics support, and are able to hold their victims for months if necessary to bargain for huge ransoms.

Third, there are the kidnappings and often murders of suspected guerrillas, guerrilla sympathizers, or just plain leftists carried out by right-wing extremists who on occasion also happen to have been government security officials, and whose operations are reported to have been sanctioned by high-level officials in the government. Ransom demands are seldom involved.

Fourth, there are the numerous kidnappings of foreign or local businessmen or members of wealthy families. These are carried out by common criminals who sometimes attempt to pose as members of guerrilla organizations to improve their bargaining position. These kidnappers want cash, usually do not have the holding capacity of the guerrilla groups, and tend to settle sooner for smaller amounts. However, it is not always easy to distinguish between kidnappings by genuine political elements and those by common criminals posing as political extremists.

The kidnapping of a Paraguayan consul in March 1970, an honorary British consul a year later, a USIS official in 1974, and a U.S. consular agent in 1975, although carried out by Peronist urban guerrillas, do not fall into any of these four categories. In the cases of the Paraguayan consul and American consular agent, the payoff demanded by the kidnappers was purely political--the release or exhibition of prisoners held by the government. In the first case, the kidnappers released their hostage when the government refused to negotiate. In the second case, the government's refusal led to the hostage's death. In the case of the honorary British consul, the ransom demands appear to have been related more to the hostage's position as an executive of the Swift Company than to his connection with the British government. In fact, his kidnapping appears to mark a shift in tactics, or at least in targets, by the Argentine guerrillas from the political kidnappings--such as those that were taking place in Guatemala, Brazil, and Uruguay--to kidnappings of businessmen for cash ransom. No demands were made for the release of the USIS official, who was seriously wounded during the abduction and released shortly after.

Argentina was the first country in the hemisphere to announce a no-concession policy. The government refused to pay ransom, nor would it release political prisoners to gain the release of a government official or foreign diplomat. It should be pointed out that the life of a major diplomat was not at stake in the episode when Argentina made this announcement, only that of a minor Paraguayan official, and that the Paraguayan government was in full agreement. It might have made some difference had the hostage been the senior representative of a nation that was politically or economically more important to Argentina than Paraguay, and whose government might not have so readily acquiesced in Argentina's hard line approach. Would it have been the same, for example, had the terrorists kidnapped the Italian or German ambassador? Possibly. But when the same group that kidnapped and killed the American consular agent subsequently kidnapped the president of the Supreme Court and demanded the release of one prisoner, the government promptly complied. Nonetheless, the hard line approach suggested that bargaining for diplomats held hostage, if bargaining

took place at all, would be difficult. The foreign companies represented a far easier and, as it turned out, extremely lucrative target.

The government of Argentina also initially took a hard line toward the payment of ransom by corporations, warning that those paying ransom would be prosecuted, and launching intensive police searches for the kidnappers' hideout when an executive was kidnapped. The discovery by police of the hideout where a Fiat executive was being held by leftist guerrillas in 1972 resulted in a shoot-out during which the hostage was killed. The threat of prosecution hardly acted as an incentive to cooperate with the authorities, and the death of the Fiat executive suggested to the foreign corporations that notifying the authorities could jeopardize the safety of the hostage. As a result, the Argentine government backed away from its threat to prosecute those paying ransom, while on their part the companies preferred to negotiate quietly, sometimes clandestinely, with kidnappers. Kidnappings of business executives continued, reaching their period of greatest intensity in 1972 and 1973. In 1974 and 1975 the number of kidnappings declined somewhat, possibly because the leftist guerrillas became engaged in a life and death struggle with government security forces and right-wing terrorists, possibly also because the huge ransoms gained in the EXXON and Born cases adequately filled the guerrillas' war chests. The urban guerrillas have also attempted to operate a rural front in northern Argentina, which may have engaged their manpower resources.

The apprehension record of the Argentine security authorities has been poor for a variety of reasons. Although the federal police have generally been competent, the quality of the provincial police in such industrial centers as Córdoba is poor. Moreover, the number of policemen murdered also suggested that the vigorous performance of one's duties was dangerous. The urban guerrillas would have posed a particularly difficult problem for any police, no matter how competent. They were large, well-organized movements with extensive undergrounds. They represented the cutting edge of the Peronist movement and had considerable popular support, especially compared with the unpopular military government that ruled Argentina in the late 1960s and early 1970s. There were also constraints on the security authorities, one being that

some of the guerrillas were reported to be the sons and daughters of socially and politically prominent families. As soon as it became apparent that the military government was going to allow Perón to return, action against the Peronist guerrillas became even more difficult. And when Hector Cámpora, Perón's surrogate presidential candidate, won the election and took office in 1973, action against guerrillas became futile. Even while executives were still being held by guerrillas for ransom, Cámpora was granting amnesty and releasing from prison over a hundred guerrillas, including kidnappers who had been caught. This totally undercut the position of the companies and of the police. Effective action against the guerrillas continued to be difficult under the subsequent governments, owing to the delicate political balance that Perón was attempting to maintain. The recent overthrow of Isabel Perón and the assumption of power by the military has been followed by an increase in the number of political murders in Argentina. It may presage a crackdown by the authorities. The new government recently prohibited the publication of any news about terrorist activities except that made in official announcements.

The immediate adoption of a no-concessions policy by the Argentine government may have discouraged further kidnappings of diplomats as a means of wringing concessions from the government; Argentina did not undergo a series of diplomatic kidnappings as did Brazil, although foreign diplomats were kidnapped in 1974 and 1975. However, the government's policy may have deflected the kidnapping toward the foreign business community where the government's attempts to prevent the payment of ransom were ineffective. The increased security measures taken by government officials, foreign diplomats, and members of the foreign business community often made kidnapping more difficult but did not prevent it. The guerrilla organizations were able to overcome the security measures by force or surprise. The apprehension record was extremely poor, and political constraints prevented crackdowns on the organizations involved in the kidnappings. As a result, kidnappings have continued.